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SUBJECT: COLOMBIA'S YEAR FOR THE BOOKS IN THE FIGHT AGAINST DRUGS

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: In 2008, the NAS coordinated closely with the Colombian Government to achieve sustainable nationalization for USG-supported programs. With significant help from the USG, the Colombian Government made great strides in battling narcoterrorism and denying Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs) like the FARC the funding they need to support their criminal activities in Colombia and the region. Through manual and aerial eradication, the GOC seized a record 229,227 hectares of coca in 2008 - an increase of 10,335 hectares compared to 2007. In 2008, the Colombian National Police (CNP) exceeded their 2007 cocaine/marijuana seizures by 61 percent, and destroyed an unprecedented 1,753 laboratories. The Air Bridge Denial (ABD) helped the GOC to maintain control of Colombia's airspace - in 2008, only 60 Unknown Assumed Suspect (UAS) tracks were registered - less than one tenth of those registered in 2003. The Colombian Army Counter-Drug (CD) Brigade provided security for aerial and manual eradication missions, and conducted interdiction and high value target operations against FTOs. The Ministry of Defense's demobilization program had a record year - a total of 3,461 individuals demobilized in 2008; demobilization of mid-level leaders more than doubled from 179 in 2007 to 398 in 2008, providing valuable intelligence that has considerably weakened terrorist organizations. NAS/INL supported the carrying out of a first nation-wide household drug consumption survey to take place since ¶1996. Record seizures of narcotics, materiel, and personnel in Colombia greatly contributed to the 27 percent rise in price of cocaine in major U.S. cities from the first quarter of 2007 to the first quarter of 2008, and to the dilution of purity by 16 percent for the same time period. END SUMMARY.

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ERADICATION  
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¶2. (SBU) The Aerial Eradication Program continued its record of outstanding results. In 2008, the program eradicated a total of 133,496 hectares of coca, surpassing the 2008 spray goal of 130,000 hectares and representing over hundreds of metric tons of potential cocaine hydrochloride (HCl) kept from U.S. streets. The aerial eradication program also supported the Colombian police and military forces' promotion of civil governance and rule of law in the aerial eradication forward-operating locations, precisely in those areas where enforcement of civil authority has been most problematic. Increased efficiencies in intelligence preparation for the aerial spray operating areas, insertion of Colombian troops on the ground, and variations in spray formation tactics all improved aircrew safety. Compared to the previous five years, the number of hostile ground-fire impacts dropped by one-fifth, with no crewmember deaths or serious injuries sustained.

¶3. (SBU) Manual eradication operations largely focused on 11

departments, including all major coca growing regions in Colombia. Manual eradication of coca in 2008 totaled 95,731 hectares - a new record. Although short of the Colombian Government's goal of 100,000 hectares, the total significantly surpassed the 65,587 hectares of coca eradicated in 2007. Attacks on manual eradication groups left 26 eradicators and security personnel dead and dozens injured. Most of the deaths and injuries were caused by landmines and IEDs planted in coca fields, as well as by sniper fire. There were 16 deaths in 2007, bringing casualties to a total of 120 deaths since 2005.

14. (SBU) NAS Bogota assistance for manual eradication increased in 2008 and included airlift and material assistance. In 2008, NAS-supported aircraft flew nearly 3,000 flight hours in support of manual eradication operations at a cost of over USD four million. Hundreds of blade hours, not captured in this total, were flown during the detection and planning phases of the manual eradication campaign. The police EMCAR units (totaling thousands of police officers) providing security for the manual eradicators were also trained and equipped with NAS funds. Other support included mine detectors, communications equipment, backpack sprayers and herbicide - totaling nearly USD 400,000.

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AVIATION  
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15. (SBU) NAS contributions to the Colombian National Police (CNP) ARAVI (Area of Aviation) Program included contractor and logistical support for 19,900 flight hours for aircraft supported by the USG. These flight hours supported aerial and manual eradication operations, intelligence gathering, interdiction missions (over 305 metric tons confiscated), 25 extraditions to the U.S., and general support flights providing mobility to police personnel and extending their presence and security throughout the country. NAS funded the completion of three C-26 Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance Aerial Platforms (ISRAP) that will greatly increase the GOC's intelligence gathering capability. Additionally, the procurement of an airborne mapping camera and installation on the C-208 Caravan aircraft enhanced ARAVI's ability to detect and verify illicit crops. NAS increased contractor mechanic support for six months that resulted in four UH-1Is being repaired and returned to mission-capable status.

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INTERDICTION  
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16. (SBU) In 2008, the CNP broke their previous all-time cocaine and marijuana seizure records by 59 percent and 62 percent, respectively, and set a new mark for drug laboratory destructions at 1,753 laboratories. CNP seizures totaled 350 metric tons of cocaine (HCl, base, and paste) and marijuana this year, dwarfing its 2007 combined total of 194 metric tons seized. In total, the CNP was responsible for more than 70 percent of all of the cocaine and marijuana seized by the Government of Colombia in 2008. A variety of factors contributed to these unprecedented CNP results, including aggressive senior police leadership, an expanded and more effective CNP Antinarcotics Directorate, and a concerted institutional effort to weed out corruption from the ranks of the antinarcotics police. Additionally, the CNP commitment to sustained antinarcotics efforts by all policemen - antinarcotics and street cops alike - also proved vital to these record achievements.

17. (SBU) The Air Bridge Denial (ABD) program assisted the Colombian Government in maintaining control of Colombia's airspace. In the first year of the program in 2003, 60 Unknown Assumed Suspect (UAS) tracks were often registered in a single month, with 637 tracks total; for the entire 2008, less than 60 UAS were registered - a decrease of more than 90 percent. In 2008, 14 aircraft were impounded in Colombia - nine of which were administrative impoundments due to a lack of flight plans, license, or required permits; another 13 aircraft were impounded in neighboring countries after visual identification by ABD aircraft. Maritime support missions have also been a success story - sixteen vessels were impounded and one was scuttled by its crew during maritime operations with the support of ABD aircraft. Overall, 47 people were arrested and 9.2 metric tons of cocaine impounded via the ABD program. Improved coordination between USG and GOC agencies, mostly

under the leadership of the Joint Inter Agency Task Force South, helped to produce the aforementioned results.

¶8. (SBU) The Colombian Army Counter-Drug (CD) Brigade provided security for aerial and manual eradication, and conducted interdiction and high value target operations against Foreign Terrorist Organization members. During 2008, the CD Brigade seized over three metric tons of cocaine, 667 kilograms of coca paste, 10,077 gallons of liquid coca, 126,054 gallons of liquid precursors, 111,969 kilograms of solid precursors, 7,971,272 coca seedlings and 52,000 kilograms of coca leaf. The Brigade also located and destroyed 28 HCl laboratories, 134 coca paste laboratories, two clandestine refineries (one sulfuric acid), two mine fields, six enemy camps; and seized 27 enemy weapons and explosive caches (624 rifles, 79 hand grenades, 21 shotguns, one Night Vision Device, six revolvers, nine pistols, 8,099 rounds of ammunition, and 1,628 weapons magazines), 47 improvise explosive devices, over 200 kilograms of assorted explosives, and communications equipment.

¶9. (SBU) During 2008, the Base Security program provided three one- and two-month base security courses in coca-producing areas of Norte de Santander, Apartado and Tumaco training more than 150 Colombian Police and Military officers. Since 2006, five two-month courses have taken place to train officers from all 32 departments who have since become key assistants and advisors to the Department Commanders in identifying, planning, and executing renovation as well as new security projects in their departments. The one-month courses were focused on improving security at specific antinarcotics bases and increasing CNP's antinarcotics officer capabilities.

#### ----- POLICE REESTABLISHMENT -----

¶10. (SBU) In 2008, the Police Reestablishment Program completed the formation of 70 Rural Police Squadrons for deployment throughout the country. The squadrons seized over 26 metric tons of cocaine and base, destroyed 160 base/HCl labs, seized 2,176 weapons and 299,220 rounds of ammunition, and captured 1,599 criminals/subversives. (The Colombian National Police pays for all day-to-day operating costs for these squadrons with the exception of limited maintenance and training.) NAS donated 138 trucks to the CNP Rural Police and in early 2009 will inaugurate three rural police bases, for which the GOC will assume all operational costs.

#### ----- DEMobilIZATION -----

¶11. (SBU) The Ministry of Defense's (MOD) demobilization program broke another record in 2008, with 3,461 individuals demobilizing. Demobilization of mid-level leaders more than doubled from 179 in 2007 to 398 in 2008. The number of individuals with three or more years of experience increased by 30 percent compared to 2007. The most common motivation for desertion from illegal groups was a desire for a lifestyle change; however, demobilizations due to military pressure have been increasing. The strategy has been producing unparalleled security gains and invaluable tools in the GOC fight against terrorism.

#### ----- ENVIRONMENT -----

¶12. (SBU) The Colombian antinarcotics police (DIRAN) received 781 complaints of alleged crop damage in 2008. Approximately 22 percent of complaints were filed in the coca-rich department of Narino, where large spray operations occurred. Out of 1,077 closed cases, five percent were compensated, and 49 percent were denied because spray operations either did not occur or coca was mixed with licit crops; in 45 percent of the submitted cases applicants failed to complete the information required in order to be considered for compensation. NAS's environmental program paid 481,544,857 COP (approximately USD 216,134) to 59 complainants in 2008. The environmental section participated in various public outreach activities to provide information on environmental damage, the aerial eradication program and the complaint compensation process. NAS has co-organized or participated in over 20 information and

training sessions to explain the aerial eradication program and to train mayors on how to process a crop damage complaint. The picture museum has also become an invaluable educational tool that has traveled throughout Colombia.

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Drug Demand Reduction  
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¶13. (SBU) The Drug Demand Reduction office worked with various governmental and non-governmental organizations and supported multiple capacity building and education-based demand reduction programs. NAS Bogota provided help with training for NGOs, teachers, journalists and nurses, and worked with the UNODC, DIRAN, Shared Responsibility and Ministry of Social Protection to organize a two-day youth forum to promote a drug and violence-free lifestyle. NAS worked with the GOC to develop four drug demand prevention commercials to raise awareness of drug consumption in Colombia. NAS Bogota served on the National Household Drug Consumption Survey's technical committee and provided final funds for the successful completion of the Survey's field work on December 13; a nation-wide drug consumption survey had not taken place in Colombia since 1996.

¶14. (SBU) COMMENT: Much of the success in battling narcotrafficking has been due to the air mobility provided by the USG. The use of helicopters and aircraft helps the GOC to perform interdiction and eradication, as well as humanitarian and logistical missions. Without helicopters, the GOC could not project force or provide government presence. Colombia has made great strides in nationalizing aviation assets, but more needs to be done and they still need our help. In the last two years, over 50 aircraft have been turned over to Colombia for them to fund, maintain, and control. Colombia appears willing to continue battling narcotrafficking, but one major priority is to ensure that they have the air mobility to get the job done. The challenge over the next few years will be to pace the ongoing nationalization efforts to ensure a sustainable transition of responsibilities while tempering GOC expectations in the face of diminished USG funds. END COMMENT.  
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